



First Friday News & Views

Iowa's LGBTQ+ Newsletter of the First Friday Breakfast Club

March 2024 | Volume 29 | Issue 3

Next Meeting
Friday,
March 1
7:00 a.m.



Location
Hoyt Sherman
15th & Woodland
Des Moines



Speaker
Rob Sand

Iowa State
Auditor



Website
ffbc Iowa.org



Iowa's Trans Legislation: The Negative Impact on a Minority Community

by Byron Huff, Board President



In recent years, there has been a growing debate over the rights of transgender individuals in the United States. This debate has reached a fever pitch in the state of Iowa, where a number of bills have been introduced that would restrict the rights of trans people. However, amid the debates and policy changes, there lies a harsh reality for a minority community of transgender individuals who face significant challenges and discrimination.

One of the most pressing issues faced by transgender individuals in Iowa is the wave of legislation aimed at restricting their rights and access to essential services. From bathroom bills to restrictions on healthcare, these policies not only undermine the dignity and rights of transgender individuals, but also exacerbate existing disparities.

An Iowa law states: "Only female students, based on their sex, may participate in any team, sport, or athletic event designated as being for females, women, or girls." The measure defines "sex" as the sex listed on a student's birth certificate or adoption certificate "issued at or near the time of the student's birth." [A 2017 report](#) in the journal *Sports Medicine* that reviewed several related studies found "no direct or consistent research" on trans people having an athletic advantage over their cisgender peers, and critics say this legislation adds to the discrimination that trans people face, particularly trans youth.

A bill signed last year bans gender-affirming care for anyone under 18 years old. Fear tactics are being used that take away parental rights to handle their children's care by falsely claiming such care is permanently harming them. The truth is that most gender-affirming care such as hormone treatments simply delay the onset of puberty, giving the child time to make decisions about who they want to be. Puberty is what is truly difficult, if not impossible, to reverse once the body makes physical changes that define our appearance as adults. Bills like this have caused families to move out of Iowa and others to reconsider moving to our state.

Another bill would require transgender people to undergo surgery in order to change their legal gender. There are also measures that would permanently mark birth certificates and other legal documents with a gender-at-birth designation. How horribly harmful this would be to be treated as a second-class citizen and outed as someone who changed their gender. These types of bills are not only discriminatory, but also impractical. Many transgender people cannot afford surgery, and some may not even want surgery.

The negative impact of these bills on the transgender community in Iowa is undeniable. A recent study by the National Center for Transgender Equality found that transgender people

[continued on page 2]



in Iowa are more likely to experience discrimination in housing, employment, and healthcare than cisgender people. Moreover, the hostile political climate created by such legislation contributes to higher rates of violence and harassment against all LGBTQ+ individuals. The passage of these bills would only make the lives of transgender Iowans even more difficult. It would send a message that transgender people are not welcome in Iowa, and it would make it harder for them to live their lives authentically.

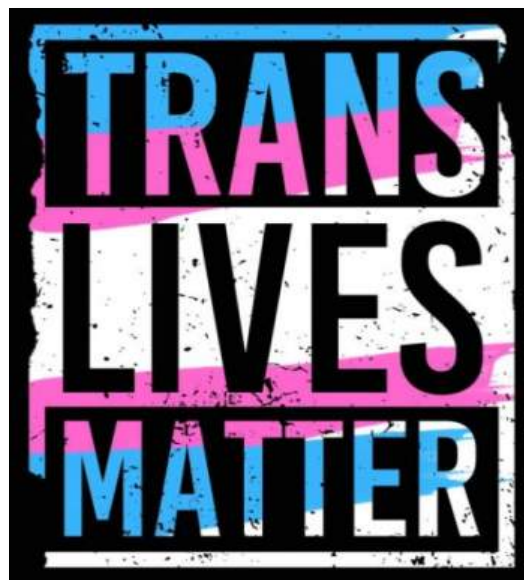
Additionally, transgender youth are disproportionately affected by discriminatory legislation in Iowa. Policies targeting transgender students, such as restrictions on participation in school sports or access to gender-affirming healthcare, not only harm their physical and mental well-being but also hinder their academic and social development. These laws send a message of exclusion and invalidation, leading to increased feelings of isolation and marginalization among transgender youth.

Furthermore, the economic impact of trans legislation on Iowa's transgender community cannot be ignored. Employment discrimination, exacerbated by hostile legislative environments, leads to higher rates of unemployment and poverty among transgender individuals. Limited job opportunities and workplace discrimination force many transgender people, especially those from marginalized backgrounds, into precarious financial situations, further perpetuating cycles of poverty and inequality.

The negative effects of trans legislation extend beyond the immediate challenges faced by individuals; they also have broader societal implications. By codifying discrimination into law, Iowa risks sending a message that transgender people are not worthy of equal rights and protections. This not only undermines the state's commitment to equality and justice, but also fosters a culture of intolerance and division.

The transgender community in Iowa is facing a number of challenges, but they are not alone; all LGBTQ+ individuals are under attack. It is important that we stand together as a community to denounce these hurtful attacks that are made solely to gain political power by creating fear. There are a number of people and organizations who are working to create a more welcoming and inclusive environment for LGBTQ+ Iowans. With continued support, the transgender community can overcome these challenges and achieve full equality.

In conclusion, the negative impact of trans legislation on Iowa's minority transgender community cannot be overstated. From exacerbating existing disparities to perpetuating systemic inequalities, these policies have far-reaching consequences that harm individuals and society as a whole. It is essential for Iowa to prioritize the rights and dignity of all its residents, including those who are transgender, by rejecting discriminatory legislation and fostering a culture of acceptance and equality.



WDM Chamber Hosts LGBTQ+ Luncheon

Uplifting diverse humanity within the workforce is essential to businesses, community members, and overall region. On Thursday, February 15, the West Des Moines Chamber of Commerce used their monthly luncheon to hear from a panel of influential leaders from several LGBTQ+ nonprofit organizations. Emphasis was on innovative ways to actively support a diverse workforce.



FFBC Board Members **Ken Hanson** and **Wade Petersen** were in attendance to represent FFBC



Then & Now

15 YEARS OF MARRIAGE EQUALITY IN IOWA

LEGISLATIVE FUNDRAISER

Wednesday, April 3, 2024, at 6:00 PM
Willow on Grand, 6011 Grand Ave, DSM
Tickets: <https://onecau.se/oneiowa15>

SAVE THE DATE

oneiowa



Briefs & Shorts

A special thanks to **Ryan Crane** for introducing our February speaker, **Ben Page**, Des Moines Parks & Rec Director. Thanks to **David Cotton** for managing our website, to **Nicholas Williams** for managing our Microsoft IT infrastructure, and to **David Wilfahrt** for managing FFBC's finances. Thanks to **Wade Petersen** for his work as our newsletter editor. *Thank you to all our newsletter contributors!*

The **deadline** for the 2024 April newsletter will be **March 25**. If you have something on your mind to share, type it up and email it to Wade (wadecpetersen@gmail.com) by the deadline.

Fundraising efforts are ongoing to fund our scholarship program. To date we have awarded over **\$450,000** for scholarships to Iowa high school seniors who have done remarkable, courageous things to reduce homophobia and teach about LGBTQ issues in their schools and communities. Please consider a tax-deductible **contribution** online or by sending a check.



A special **thank-you** to those FFBC members and friends who have chosen to designate FFBC through the **Donor Direct** program of **United Way**. Contributions through United Way are tax deductible. Those who have chosen this means of supporting FFBC have gone to the trouble of completing their United Way campaign worksheet by designating FFBC as the beneficiary of their generosity. FFBC is an eligible recipient of such funding designations.



Central Iowa Trans Lives Festival

CALL FOR PARTICIPANT SUBMISSIONS

Who can participate? **ALL TRANSGENDER, GENDERQUEER, & NON-BINARY**

- *Artists
- *Writers
- *Performers
- And Other Creators
- *Craftpersons
- *Musicians
- *Singers
- *Poets
- *Dancers
- *Food Vendors

How can you participate? **Submit your request to: tag@ucdsm.org**

Include your name, contact info, and type of work, along with a sample of your work, if possible (photos, docs, links, etc.). We will contact you with more info. *No registration fee required.*

Participants may offer their works for sale - all sales and proceeds belong to participants.

Spaces filled as applications come in, until full.

Submission Deadline: March 1, 2024

When and Where? **Saturday, March 30, 2024, 10am - 5pm**
(set up 8am-10am)
First Unitarian Church, 1800 Bell Avenue, Des Moines, IA
ADA Accessible
Security provided so everyone can enjoy a safe & fun event

What is the Trans Lives Fest? In honor of the International Transgender Day of Visibility, the Central Iowa Trans Lives Festival will provide a safe space for trans adults and youth to celebrate & present their creative work to the LGBTQIA community and other allied members of the public. Sponsored by the Queer and Transgender Action Group of First Unitarian Church of Des Moines, an LGBTQIA Welcoming Congregation & member of the Unitarian Universalist Association.

(More info at ucdsm.org & uua.org)



Partial Solution to Juvenile Gun Violence

by Jonathan Wilson



The recent criminal conviction of Jennifer Crumbly, the mother of Ethan Crumbly, who opened fire on high school classmates – killing four – got me to thinking. Imposing liability on parents of such children, in such circumstances, could have a meaningful impact on the number of gun deaths caused by juveniles. This, in a not-readily-apparent way, could help move toward a reduction in the number of deaths caused by juveniles with a gun, but it will take a little time.

This is how I think things are going to go. First, if parents of violent juveniles can be held criminally accountable, as Jennifer Crumbly has been, they can be held civilly liable. That liability could be in the millions of dollars. Think here about O.J. Simpson who, in 1996, was acquitted of murder in the deaths of Nicole Brown Simpson and her friend Ronald Goldman. Shortly thereafter, a different jury, in a civil suit, found him civilly liable (which doesn't require proof beyond a reasonable doubt) and awarded their family members \$33.5 million. That was "real money" back in 1996.

It is almost guaranteed that there will be civil suits filed against Jennifer Crumbly, the father, and Ethan seeking damages for murder and manslaughter. Getting civil liability judgments against them will be child's play for a competent attorney.

The growing realization of this liability exposure will create a market for homeowner insurance companies to offer coverage against that exposure. Such coverage would inevitably come with certain conditions. I know that my home fire insurance coverage imposes conditions about my house – shake shingles are out, for example. I had them when I first built my house. They looked nice, but my insurance premiums went down when I replaced them with less combustible roofing material.

It is somewhat predictable that homeowner insurance companies will start offering riders for coverage against that liability exposure. I can see the insurance application now. "Do you own a gun?" "What kind of gun?" "Is the gun kept in your home?" "Do juveniles have occasional access to your home?" "How is access to the gun secured?" The answers to those questions will determine whether the coverage rider will be issued, and the coverage will almost certainly come with conditions. Dishonest answers on the application form, or the failure to abide by the conditions, will compromise or void the coverage. That's axiomatic.

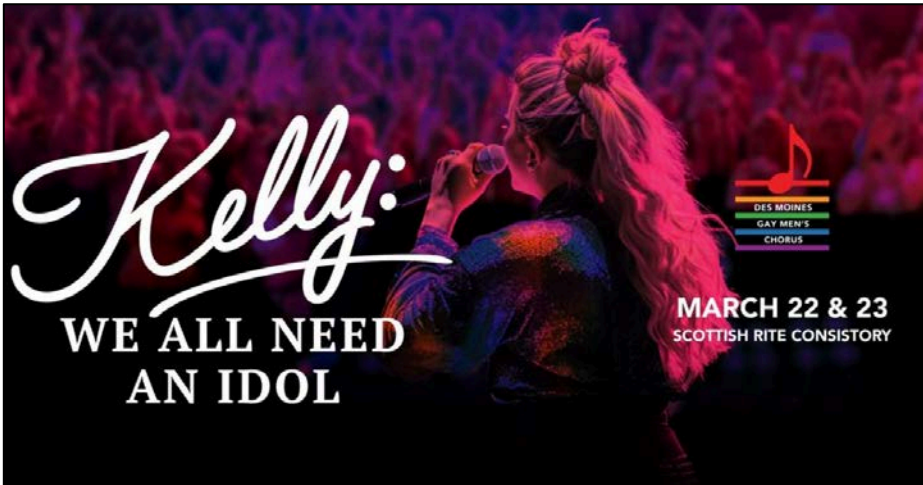
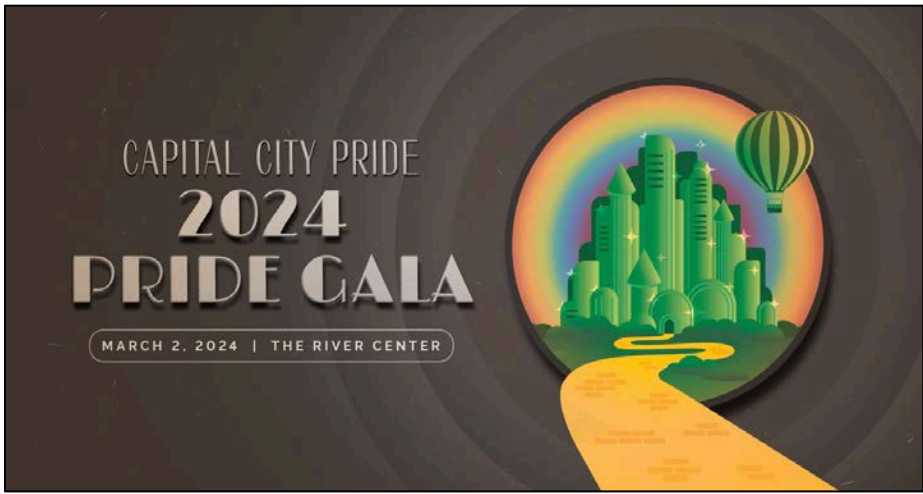
I don't think the Crumblys are people of means. Civil judgments against them will be substantial. Whatever the civil judgments against them, they will almost for sure be bankrupt. And, get this, such a judgment is not dischargeable in bankruptcy proceedings. Not for O.J. Simpson, not for the Crumblys, and not for anybody else. The Crumblys aren't people of means now, and they never will be unless they win a huge lottery. Insurance would have been a better option for them and other parents of juveniles, and compliance with insurance company requirements about controlling access to guns.

It will take awhile for all of this to soak into the homeowner insurance market and get implemented, but it will happen. It's not a complete solution to the phenomenon of juvenile gun violence, but it will be a step in the right direction.

"Could a greater miracle take place than for us to look through each other's eyes for an instant?"

(Henry David Thoreau)





FFBC Membership

FFBC membership is open to all members of the LGBTQ+ community and their allies. We welcome all guests, regardless of sexual orientation or gender. Meetings are held the first Friday of every month from 7:00 A.M. - 8:15 A.M. at Hoyt Sherman Place in Des Moines. The following membership and guest rates help us cover our food and facility costs.

In-Person Meeting Rates (Members & Guests)

- Annual Rate: \$180**
(12 consecutive meetings)
- Quarterly Rate: \$48**
(3 consecutive meetings)
- Month-by-Month: \$18**
- First Time or One-Time Attendee: \$15**
- Full-time Student: \$8**

No charge to attend via Zoom

Payment Options

Cash or check at the meeting

Credit card prior to the meeting at www.ffbciaowa.org; visit the "Membership" tab

Meeting Schedule

- 6:30 a.m. - Doors open
- 6:45 a.m. - Breakfast service begins
- 7:00 a.m. - Meeting begins



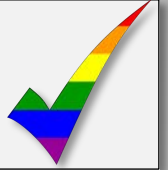
Iowa's Gay Agenda

Mission & Vision



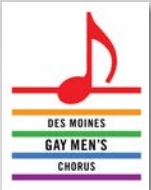
First Friday Breakfast Club

Mission: First Friday Breakfast Club works to eliminate prejudice and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. We seek to achieve this through discussion forums and media designed to educate ourselves, opinion leaders, and the general public.



One Iowa

Mission: One Iowa advances, empowers, and improves the lives of LGBTQ Iowans statewide.
Vision: One Iowa seeks to improve the lives of LGBTQ Iowans by protecting and advancing equality and inclusiveness through education, improving workplace culture, and increasing access to quality healthcare across our state.



Des Moines Gay Men's Chorus

Mission: The Des Moines Gay Men's Chorus is a community champion singing to promote harmony, ignite hearts, and move minds.
Vision: We envision a world where unconditional acceptance is woven into our common humanity.



Iowa Safe Schools

Mission: The mission of Iowa Safe Schools is to provide safe, supportive, and nurturing learning environments and communities for LGBTQ and allied youth through education, outreach, advocacy, and direct services.



Capital City Pride

Mission: Capital City Pride brings together members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender community, their friends, allies, and supporters. We do this by producing events that inspire, educate, commemorate and celebrate our diverse community and culture with and for the greater Des Moines Metro.
Vision: Our vision is to create a community where the presence and contributions of LGBTQ+ people are welcomed and celebrated; where intolerance is challenged and defeated; where justice prevails, and where civil rights of all people are valued and respected.



The Pride Center

Mission: The Des Moines Pride Center is a community organization where gender, sexual minorities, allies, and their families are supported, celebrated, and served through providing a safe environment where people can thrive as healthy, equal, and complete members of the community.
Vision: To provide a safe environment where you can thrive, host events, obtain support, and get involved in the LGBTQ+ community.



Pride Sports League

Mission: We are proud to provide safe recreational, social, and networking opportunities through sports to the LGBTQ+ community and allies in Central Iowa.



Iowa LGBTQ Chamber of Commerce

Mission: Our mission is to advance the common business interests, economic growth, and equality in the workplace for Iowa's LGBTQ+ business community and its allies.



Common Love: Queer & Clothed



Common Love is a queer resource for the Des Moines community that is partnering with The Supply Hive for our initiative **Queer & Clothed**, a monthly pop-up for people of all ages, races, sizes, and abilities to explore/find clothing that is gender-affirming and brings joy. We know there is a need in Des Moines (and Iowa) for trans, non-binary, and queer people to access **gender-affirming clothing** in a judgment-free space that prioritizes accessibility. **Join Common Love as we create a beloved community where we cherish and support one another with mutual aid.**

Our fundraising goal is **\$5,000**. Donations go to new gender-affirming items for trans folks like binders, gaffs, underwear, and bras. In 2023, we raised \$5,214 and purchased 30 binders, 4 pairs of tights, 5 pairs of shoes, 2 shapewear items, 1 packer, 1 skirt, 1 harness, 2 STPs, 2 boxers, 2 pairs of jeans, and a variety of makeup. We also purchased 54 large totes to store clothes.



Get involved with the project!

- Follow us on Instagram or Facebook @commonlovedsm
- Email us at hello@commonlovedsm.com
- Shop our next pop-up on **March 9, 2024**, from 1-3 p.m. at **Park Fair Mall, Suite #107**
- **Donate:** www.pledge.to/queer-clothed
- We accept donations of binders, tucking garments, and underwear anytime. We accept some clothing based on size (currently sizes 1x – 6x).
- **We really need volunteers to help set up and tear down the pop-up each month and to help sort/organize clothing!**



Future Speakers



April 5:

Melissa O'Neil

CEO, Central Iowa Shelter & Services

May 3:

One Iowa

Courtney Reyes & Max Mowitz

June 7:

Sarah Brown-Wessling

2010 National Teacher of the Year

July:

*MARK YOUR
CALENDAR!*

**Donor-Member
Summer Party**

August 2:

Daniel Zinnel

CEO of Proteus

November 1

John & Terri Hale

MARCH



First Friday Breakfast Club 2023 Scholar Updates

Jackson Kaune

I am so grateful to the FFBC for this scholarship and all it has allowed me to do. Because of this money, I was able to focus entirely on my school and get through my first semester of college without having to work!



Beatrice Goldberry

Things are going pretty well in Ames; I'm enjoying my classes and having fun with what I am learning. My goal for next semester is to get a little more involved in clubs and organizations.



Leo Friedman

Classes are going great so far, and I can't thank you enough for the scholarship!



Lilly Beth Froelich

This semester, I have had a great time! I got a position as a Climate Change Research Fellow at the University's toxicology lab, where I've been working with other colleges (including Harvard) on identifying toxins in the atmosphere and in the air we breathe. It's been an awesome experience! I've been loving research, because it gives me an opportunity to make a difference and help keep people safe. I also became the Social Chair of the University Choir, and the social media manager of our school's Cross-stitch and embroidery club! I've made quite a few friends, and have been getting good grades: both things that I have been very happy about. Last month, my research project on homelessness in Iowa City was displayed in the Old Capitol Mall! Next week, I'll be presenting an additional research project on the toxicology of Arsenic to students and faculty in the Chemistry Building. This summer, I might be joining a research group in Switzerland to study chemical runoff in the Rhine River! If that works out, it'll be awesome. Working two jobs to pay for college has been tough at times, but I really think that I'm balancing it well! Thank you so much for helping me on my college journey; I am forever grateful.





March Speaker

Rob Sand



Rob Sand is Iowa's 33rd State Auditor. He was elected in 2018 after serving seven years as Iowa's chief public corruption prosecutor in the Iowa Attorney General's Office. There, he led the discovery and prosecution of the largest lottery rigging scheme in American history. He also prosecuted the Iowa Film Office Tax Credit scandal, the only criminal prosecution related to a global Ponzi Scheme, as well as dozens of other financial crimes. He also prosecuted violent crime and nearly two dozen sexually violent predators.

Upon his election, he created a senior leadership team that included a Democrat, Independent, and Republican, with two of the three individuals having made campaign contributions to his opponent's campaign. Since he was sworn in, the Auditor's Office has: added a law enforcement background and perspective to the Office; created a new public innovation and efficiency (PIE) program that helps government entities save substantial amounts of taxpayer dollars; made it possible for employees to take their jobs with them to small towns and rural areas anywhere in the state; stood up against taxpayers getting stuck footing the bill for sexual harassment by public employees; and taken a state department all the way to the Iowa Supreme Court and won a unanimous decision, in order to receive documents related to the single largest financial deal in state history. This is all in addition to continuing the Office's standard financial audits and investigative reports.

Rob was born and raised in Decorah, Iowa. Rob attended and graduated from Brown University. After college, Rob chose to return to Iowa to attend the University of Iowa Law School on a full merit scholarship. He was the first student ever to be both a President of the Iowa Student Bar Association and an Editor-in-Chief of a law journal.

Rob and his wife Christine live in Des Moines and have two sons.



Speaker Series

[Tickets are free, but you must register online]

March 21 / 6:00 P.M. / Temple Theater

Michael Arceneaux

Michael Arceneaux is the *New York Times* bestselling author of *I Can't Date Jesus: Love, Sex, Family, Race, and Other Reasons I've Put My Faith in Beyoncé*. His second book, the essay collection, *I Don't Want To Die Poor*, was named one of *Time's* 100 Must Read Books of 2020 and NPR's best books of the year. His latest book is *I Finally Bought Some Jordans*.



The Annual Governor's Conference

ON LGBTQ YOUTH

Friday, April 5

**Meadows Convention Center
Altoona, IA**

**Registration
Now Open!**

iagovcon.org



Ben Page Addresses FFBC

by Gary Moore

Ben Page, Director of the Des Moines Park and Recreation Department since November 2012, addressed the First Friday Breakfast Club and 50 or so members who came in the morning darkness of this early February morning. He is responsible for a \$15 million operating budget and a six-year \$50+ million capital improvement program; 60 full-time and 300+ part-time employees; multiple contracts, leases, and operating agreements to provide privatized service; 77 parks and open spaces; over 4000 acres of park and open space land; 69 miles of paved trails; three golf courses; aquatic centers and beaches; marina; community recreation centers; sports complexes; performing arts amphitheatres; world-class artists sculpture park; riverwalk; AAA baseball stadium; zoological park; botanical center; city-wide streetscapes; cemeteries; skating plaza; and recreational programming. That, in and of itself, is impressive, but what is even more so is the enthusiasm and creativeness which he does so.

Ben's slideshow explaining the city funding mechanism where Park and Recreation funds come from and how they are spent was instructional, but what was even more so was the efficiency and the attention to creativity in which those funds are used. He and a minimal staff have created a park and recreational system that received regional and national recognition by maximizing volunteer involvement while paying attention to providing services in an equitable and mission-driven manner.

Ben highlighted his work with FFBC members Matt McCoy with the Polk County Board of Supervisors, as well as Mike Simonson, noted Des Moines architect now running for the City Council. The Parks and Recreation has created inventive programs such as the Woodland Cemetery History Quest using QR codes for a self-guided history tour with 70 short videos narrated by descendants of the families interred there. This program was created and now maintained by volunteers.

Ben noted that the average Des Moines home is assessed at around \$170,000. The Parks and Recreation Department receives approximately \$170 of the property taxes. The Department has emphasized trying to keep any fees low so more people can take advantage of all that the department has to offer, most of which is free. He said he likes to note that taking a family of four to a movie and popcorn is difficult to do for \$100. Where else could you get parks, splash pools, and all that is offered for the annual investment?

He is excited by several capitol improvement projects underway including a commercial-grade greenhouse that will be primarily volunteer-operated and will expand the department's ability to make the city parks beautiful. The Reichart Recreational Center will be built and replace the over 100-year-old Grubb Center. The restoration of the Union Park Rocket Slide is another project that has benefitted from public support.

Ben also noted that with investment in several sports and amphitheater venues, our city businesses reap great rewards and benefits from events and the regional, state, and national sports competitions that are now hosted here. He mentioned that several events fill up Des Moines hotels and restaurants, creating jobs and income for the city.

All in all, First Friday Breakfast Club members were extremely impressed with Ben's presentation and left with a greater understanding and appreciation of the vast responsibilities and coverage of the Des Moines Parks and Recreation Department.



February Speaker

DSM Parks & Rec Director
Ben Page

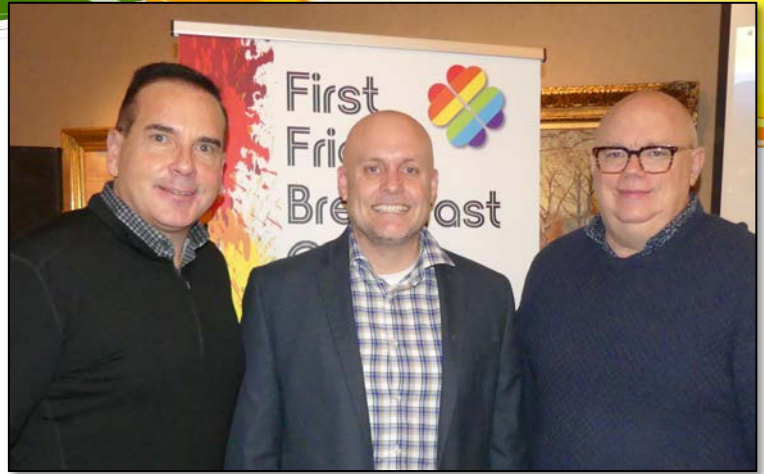


February Meeting Photo Gallery

Photos By
Gary Moore & Wade Petersen



Ryan Crane
Introduces
the
Speaker



Matt McCoy, Ben Page, & Mike Simonson



The Governor Fiddles While Kids Go Unfed

HUNGER



by Supervisor Matt McCoy
Polk County, 1st District



Once again, the highly unlikeable Governor Kim Reynolds has targeted hungry kids as her next political ploy in an effort to convince voters that Iowa kids are obese and don't deserve to participate in the U.S.D.A. extended summer feeding program which would contribute \$40 per month per eligible child to ensure kids have proper nutrition this summer. The governor has used zero data or facts to back up her claim. Meanwhile, DMARC and the Food Bank of Iowa have set new records in 2023 to address the growing food scarcity needs of our communities. In the latest newsletter from DMARC, they described 2023 as **B.O.A.T.** which means the Busiest Year Of All Time.

The governor has spoken about how she trusts Iowans to make good decisions, and yet she takes away the right for parents to address the nutritional needs of their children in an appropriate way. Childhood obesity is a problem that is caused by poor diets and lack of appropriate exercise. If families had more resources, they could purchase more vegetables, fruits, and whole foods which would lead to healthier outcomes. Unfortunately, the cost associated with a healthy diet, given the recent spike in inflation in recent years at the grocery aisle, has strained

families financially, and many of the foods that are the most affordable are the least healthy, most processed, the highest in fructose corn syrup, and other unhealthy additives.

In an effort to try to secure part of the \$29 million in federal funds for this program that would feed 27,000 Polk County kids who qualify, the Polk County Board of Supervisors wrote directly to U.S.D.A. Secretary Tom Vilsack to find a way that Polk County could create their own system. Unfortunately, Secretary Vilsack said federal regulations prohibit it. This requires it be run by the state. At the time of this writing, due to the outcry in the state of Nebraska, their governor reversed course and is implementing the summer feeding program. We, as Iowans, need to pressure our governor, who doubled down on her opposition just recently, to do what Nebraska has done.

In any language, childhood hunger are ugly words. In Iowa, the breadbasket of the world, it is unnecessary, it is unacceptable, and it is cruel.



BALLET DES MOINES PRESENTS

LOVE LETTERS

MARCH 8, 2024 | 8:00 PM

March 9, 2024 | 7:00 PM

Hoyt Sherman Place

Ballet Des Moines once again brings back the father of American ballet, George Balanchine, alongside work from internationally renowned choreographer Christopher Wheeldon. This triple bill concludes with the world premiere of **Love Letters**, Tom Mattingly's ode to the LGBT+ community of Iowa.



Past Lives

A Movie Review by Mark Turnage

It's Oscars season once again! For this month's review, I chose a Best Picture nominee I personally recognize as an outstanding example among this year's selections. Nominated for both Best Picture and Best Original Screenplay, *Past Lives* by debut writer/director Celine Song is inspired by her own life experiences, following two South Korean friends as their relationship changes over 24 years of time and long-distance. What makes *Past Lives* Oscar-worthy is how gracefully Song uses intersectionality as the foundation for her characters, the reinforcement of the film's main themes, and the emotional power of its romance.

The story weaves three time periods together in the lives of Na Young (Greta Lee) and Hae Sung (Teo Yoo): as twelve-year old childhood crushes in Seoul, South Korea, in 2000; as twenty-somethings dating long-distance between Manhattan and Seoul in 2012; and as thirty-somethings meeting in Manhattan in 2024, leading separate lives. As kids, their friendship blossoms until Na Young casually announces her family is emigrating to Toronto in front of their class; a heartbroken Hae Sung walks her back to her house in silence and gives her a one-word goodbye before she leaves. Twelve years later, the two reconnect through Facebook, and their childhood crush becomes an adult romance separated by screens: Hae Sung in Seoul studying engineering, and Na Young in Manhattan building her writing career.

For anyone dating long-distance, the film captures the experience authentically: snoozing past Skype video

calls in different time zones, dropped calls and garbled connections interrupting romantic moments, and coordinating dinner dates around the glow of a screen, to name a few, but also scenes made endearing by the playful chemistry between the two leads. When their relationship inevitably comes into conflict, Song's script continues to make intelligent choices, steering away from lover's quarrels in favor of her characters reckoning with their own personal lifepaths and what they're willing to compromise. Song illustrates the divide between the two isn't just distance or technology, it's identity. Na Young's identity as a Korean-American means she understands but not necessarily identifies with the cultural traditions Hae Sung experiences every day: living with his parents until his college is finished versus Na Young's independent search for success, for example. Late in the film, she describes Hae Sung as "very Korean," and admits to herself how strange that sounds coming from her. In the third act, we meet Arthur, Na Young's husband, but instead of becoming a villain or antagonistic force, he demonstrates empathy for his wife's past in South Korea and the feelings her and Hae Sung share. It's a progressive step for a romance movie to completely forgo possessiveness as a plot point—and Arthur is still very much worried about the love his wife could have for someone from her past—but it's a thought-out choice that allows them both to notice and respect Hae Sung's point of view and feelings instead of coming into direct conflict with them. Na Young also



explains the concept of "In-Yun," when lovers from past lives meet in the present, and that love with missed connection could be stronger or closer in another life. This is a romance film, but one that manages to be both bittersweet and uplifting.

Song's sensitive and intelligent script is reinforced by cinematography characterized by slow pans and zooms of the Seoul and Manhattan skylines, emphasizing the serene beauty of both cities and favoring close, tight shots to invite the audience in on the characters' intimacy. While its pacing could be improved, *Past Lives'* masterful use of intersectionality to convey both distance and intimacy while smartly choosing curiosity and choice over conflict makes this not just an intelligent romance, but a frontrunner for Best Picture. See it through Paramount Plus or Amazon on streaming.



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Contact Us At: info@ffbciaowa.org

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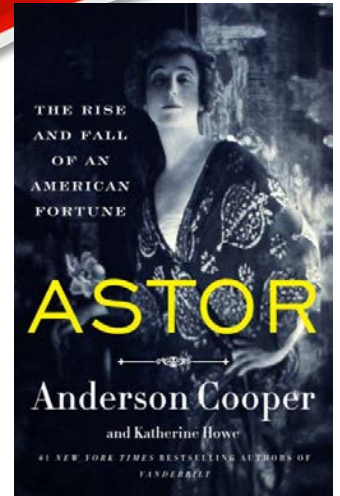
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Astor: The Rise and Fall of an American Fortune

By Anderson Cooper &
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A
Book
Review by
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John Jacob Astor, a German immigrant to America in 1784, arrived in this country virtually penniless. Yet he became the richest man in America through various business dealings. The son of a butcher, Astor used his knowledge of that trade to begin his rise to wealth.

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, beaver fur was in high demand. Furs were used for making top hats for men and coats for both men and women. In Europe, beavers were not nearly as plentiful as they were in the vast network of rivers and lakes in America. The horrid traps used in catching those innocent animals make for very uncomfortable reading. To think that this man became so rich by the blood of innocent animals is disgusting.

As he settled in New York City, Astor began purchasing as much property as he could in sparsely settled Manhattan. He eventually left the fur-trading business and concentrated exclusively in real estate. New York City underwent tremendous growth in the early nineteenth century, and Astor provided necessary housing for the burgeoning population. He built tenements and leased them to landlords for a specified amount of time. Since the landlords didn't actually own the tenements, they had no interest in keeping them in good repair. When those leases expired, Astor carved these buildings into ever smaller units, and families with many children were cramped into one or two rooms.

Conversely, Astor and his family built tremendous homes for themselves, and as the "Smart Set" grew in wealth, they built ever larger and conspicuous homes as Manhattan grew northward. These palaces grew so large, that by 1890, Mrs. Caroline Schermerhorn Astor created the Elite 400 social registry in New York as that was the number she could fit into the ballroom of her townhome.

It took five generations of Astors to use up the tremendous wealth that the original John Jacob Astor created. At the time of her death at age 102 in 2004, Brooke Astor wanted to give all her money to various causes. Her son, however, manipulated his aged mother with various codicils to her will that eventually ended in a court battle. He finally lost, and Brooke's desire to use her money for good purposes won out.

The influence of the Astors in New York City can still be found around town. For example, the New York City Public Library still stands as one of the family's crowning achievements. The magnificent Waldorf Astoria Hotel played host to royalty and VIPs for decades. Before that building went up, the Astor Hotel played a major role in the gay lives of many New Yorkers and visitors. The bar in that hotel curved and two distinct sections provided areas for straight men and gay men. The gay side of the bar afforded contacts for men in a most discreet setting. Homosexuality was a crime, so subtle signals became the way men could meet each other. The men were not permitted to show any signs of affection, and if they did, they were escorted out of the building. While great strides of equality are now in place, the Astor Hotel was pivotal in the long struggle for equality. The hotel closed in the early 1960s and was torn down in 1966.

This is a well-written catalog of the Astors, and it is also a good lesson that while wealth can make living comfortable, it can also be a prison. I highly recommend this book.

